

Apology Dice, a collaborative performance

December 12, 2019

Hello Teaching Practices Colloquium selection committee:

We, artistic collaborators David Garneau and Clement Yeh, are responding to your call for presentations that consider the themes of “Opening Up” and “Indigenization”.

The Apology Dice is an interactive art performance that engages small groups in conversation—about Indian Residential Schools, colonialization, and possibilities of reconciliation—through the rolling of large, custom-made cedar dice.

Each die is cast one at a time, and in order, to form a sentence. The words on the faces of the first die read: “I am” / “We are” / “They are”. The second die reads: “so” / “fairly” / “really” / “not” / “somewhat” / “deeply”. The words of the third die display “sorry” on five sides and “tired of this” on the remaining side. The participant reads the sentence aloud and interprets its meaning, in the context of First Nations reconciliation in Canada, and in light of what has happened (or not happened) since the official apology for Indian Residential Schools offered by Harper’s Conservative government in 2008. Combinations may include: “I am / so / sorry”; “We are / not / sorry.”; or “They are / really / tired of this”. Who is the dice speaking for? The government, the churches that ran the schools, First Nations peoples, or the non-indigenous public? Do official apologies matter, even if they are not followed up with concrete actions?

Apology Dice is an artistic effort to stir emotional response, to help participants discover, educate, heal, and express their feelings about this history. For ambivalent participants, rolling the dice may prompt more certainty. To those feeling decided, play may reinforce their beliefs or perhaps unsettle them. One of my principal goals at the TPC is to connect with faculty who would like to bring the Apology Dice into their classrooms.

-David Garneau and Clement Yeh

*Please note that only Clement Yeh will be available to attend the colloquium. Also note that this is the same project I (Clement) presented at the TPC in 2017. I continue to strongly believe in this project’s contribution to reconciliation.

**More images and text on the project are available here:
www.makerbros.com/Apology-Dice 1



Since its creation in November 2013, Apology Dice has been presented in the following venues:

Galleries

Art Gallery of Algoma, June 2014. Joint exhibition between David Garneau and Clement Yeh.

Universities

"Aboriginal Art, Trauma, and Healing" fine arts course, Algoma University and Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, March 2016.

"Creative Commons" lecture and workshop series, held in the Aboriginal Gathering Place, Emily Carr University, Vancouver, BC, February 2016.

"The Land We Are" book launch, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC, October 2015.

"Word and Image: Graphic Novels, Adaptations, and New Media" English 383 course, Simon Fraser U, Vancouver, BC, October 2015.

Publications

"Hungry Listening: Between Indigenous Ontologies of Song & Settler Colonial Musical Logic," Dylan Robinson, University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

"Apology Dice", C Magazine – Contemporary Art and Criticism, summer edition, 2018.

"The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation in Canada", edited by Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill & Sophie McCall, Arp Books, 2015.

What people are saying about the Apology Dice

"They are quite light, but I imagine that the more they get played, the heavier they will become."

-Aboriginal elder, survivor of the Shingwauk Residential School, 2014

"I have friends who don't believe in the transformative power of art. This project proves art can be."

-MFA student, Emily Carr University, 2016

"I mentioned that the Truth and Reconciliation events that took place at ECU last year made a strong impression on me. I knew about the history, but I had not heard about people stories of how this part of our history had affected them. I felt that it was important for me to be there, to hear the stories, to share their feelings in as much as it was possible. I felt that it is vital that we all keep these stories alive, that we spread the information and the Apology Dice Project is a good example of how we can keep the momentum. It is still quite surprising to me that there are so many Canadians that don't know about what Truth and Reconciliation is about, and therefore are not aware of the history and the damage that has caused to our country as a whole."

-Angeles Correa, Faculty member, Emily Carr University, 2016

"I really wanted to listen as much as possible. I didn't speak. The perspectives that were shared were often broad and vague or relating to an individual's own personal experience (through their own cultural background). Sometimes the conversation went way off track and other times it was very focused on what the dice said "I am ", "We are", "They are"...these were the most educational moments. When discussion about a sense of personal responsibility as Canadians was being discussed, I felt the power behind the dice. One of the things the dice did was to bring us to a smaller discussion, create a safe place for people to share emotions, realize they even had emotions, and be raw around a subject that can get buried in policies and far-reaching goals,: the dice allows for chance and risks in our own thinking and way of being around total strangers. I like the idea of chance and risk in the context of Aboriginal people; it draws to our attention the fragility of human lives, which also relates a lot to "killing the Indian" within all those who attended Residential Schools. Overall, this is a powerful piece of art because of the questions that are raised within each audience/ viewer/ participator whether we like it or not. The Apology Dice is what a lot more art should demand."

- Faculty member, Emily Carr University, 2016

"It will take many generations to build better relationships; there is much to do, and this is some of the most meaningful work that those of us who live as guests or settlers on Indigenous land can do. There needs to be material restitution, and we need to respect the land by learning and practicing Coast Salish values on unceded territories. Also, treaty rights need to be respected, and the damage of land theft and dispossession addressed."

-Rita Wong, Faculty member, Emily Carr University, 2016

Profiles:

David Garneau (Métis) is Head of Visual Arts at the University of Regina. His work focuses on painting, drawing, curation, and critical writing. He often engages issues of nature, history, masculinity, and contemporary Aboriginal identity. His paintings are in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, The Canadian Parliament, Indian and Inuit Art Centre, the Glenbow Museum, the Mackenzie Art Gallery, and many other public and private collections. He has curated several large group exhibitions: *The End of the World (as we know it)*; *Picture Windows: New Abstraction*; *Transcendent Squares*; *Sophisticated Folk*; *Contested Histories*; *Making it Like a Man!*; *Graphic Visions*; *TEXTiles*; and *Looking Forward, Never Forgetting* with Michelle LaVallee.

Garneau has recently given talks in Melbourne, Adelaide, New York, San Diego, Sacramento, Kingston, and key note lectures in Sydney, Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Sault Ste Marie. He is currently working on curatorial and writing projects featuring contemporary Indigenous art and curatorial exchanges between Canada and Australia, and is part of a five-year, SSHRC funded curatorial research project, "Creative Conciliation." He is also touring *Dear John; Louis David Riel*, a performance piece featuring a Riel sculpture interacting with John A. Macdonald statues across Canada.

Clement Yeh is a Canadian of Chinese ancestry. He holds a BFA in Drawing from the Alberta College of Art and Design and an MFA in Sculpture from Concordia. He has exhibited his work in drawing and sculpture at various venues across Canada and the United States. In 2013, he served as Studio Technician for a group of mid-career artists working with Indigenous themes at a residency called "Reconsidering Reconciliation", held at the Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada, Thompson Rivers University (TRU), in Kamloops, BC. This experience, coupled with the many social challenges faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada, ignited a desire for him to participate in that conversation of healing and education, which is how the *Apology Dice* collaboration began. He lives and works in Kamloops with his young family, and teaches sessionally in Visual Arts at TRU.

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